

# Tiny community grew as a result of Ireland's potato famine

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## ASKEATON

**T**here are two Askeatons in the world, and without a good map, you might miss them both.

The original Askeaton is located in central Ireland. It's

a small community in the county of Limerick, located about 10 miles west of the city of Limerick.

The other Askeaton is in Wisconsin.

It's a small community in southern Brown County in the Town of Holland, about 10 miles north of Brillion.

The unincorporated community today consists of a tavern, a Catholic church and a number of rural homes and dairy farms.

The center of Askeaton might be considered the intersection of County Z and Church Road, but some locals say the Askeaton community also includes the surrounding several square miles.

Wisconsin's Askeaton can trace its past to 19th century Irish poverty and the failure of a potato crop.

In the mid 1800s, Ireland was a relatively poor country, dependent on the potato as a staple food.

In 1845 a blight devastated the country's potato harvest, marking the beginning of a period referred to in Irish history as The Great Famine.

Many of the people who survived the famine fled the country.

According to an 1841 census, Ireland's population was 8 million people. By 1901, the country's population was less than 4.5 million.

Many of Ireland's residents came to the United States, hoping to begin a new life.

A number of Irish families settled in the area that is now called Askeaton.

"It was a thick Irish settlement," said Bob Clancy, whose ancestors settled Askeaton in the 1840s.

According to the book "Askeaton...From the Old Sod...to the New" by John Hart, the first Askeaton settlers arrived in New York in 1849 at the end of the famine.

Askeaton resident Jo Ann Wall has researched the community's past and has obtained early Brown County census records.

The records indicate that indi-



## NEIGHBORHOOD profile

cate many of Askeaton's residents first lived in places like Ohio and Virginia before coming to Askeaton in the 1850s.

"They probably had no money when they came over so they had to work their way across the country," she said.

There are still people in Askeaton with Irish roots.

According to 1990 U.S. census information, there are a large number of people in Brown County who say they have Irish ancestry.

While there are larger numbers of people in the county with German or Belgian ancestry, 25,821 of the 194,594 people in Brown County in 1990 reported having Irish ancestry.

Askeaton's "four corners" has been the longtime center of the community.

It's located on a ridge that is part of the Niagara Escarpment, a major geologic feature that stretches all the way to Niagara Falls.

The ridge provides the people of Askeaton with scenic views. From some places in the community, residents say they can see High Cliff State Park at Sherwood, 15 miles away.

The intersection of Church Road and County Z once had taverns on three corners, a dance hall, a stable for horses and a general store.

Not far from the intersection there were once two cheese factories, a train depot, a blacksmith shop, a school and a Catholic church called St. Patrick's Church.

Today, nearly every business in Askeaton is closed.

The 1908 church and a tavern remain. Although the tavern has been heavily remodeled, it is in a building that has housed a tavern for more than a century.

Lynn Duffeck has owned the property for nearly 17 years.

"I was sick of tending bar for someone else," she said.

Duffeck is aware of the bar's long history. On one wall she has made a montage of photos that combines shots of patrons from the 1930s with pictures taken at the bar today.

The tavern does a brisk business. On one recent Monday after-

noon, the bar was nearly full.

"We have a good time here," she said.

Wall said that over the years the farms became larger and the number of people in Askeaton began to shrink.

"The 40-acre farms became 80-acre farms that became 160-acre farms," she said.

While Askeaton residents say the community is more diverse now than it was a century ago, there are still people who can trace their roots to the past.

On the north side of Askeaton, Arelene Hanaway lives in a home her husband's ancestors constructed more than a century ago.

A plaque in front of her farmhouse reads, "Home of Hanaway est. August 10, 1858."

Hanaway said Irish families in the community have included people named Burns, Clancy, Farrell and Hart.

According to Hart's book, early settlers by the name of Summer and Wall came from Askeaton, Ireland.

Hanaway said she once traveled to Ireland and visited the Askeaton there.

"It's just a crossroads, really," she said.